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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to determine the value of individualized instruction used in three sociology classes at Moraine Valley Community College (Illinois). The classes incorporated a programmed learning textbook, measurable behavioral objectives, instructor-student conferences, self-paced learning, and immediate student gratification. A questionnaire to determine pre-course expectations, an evaluation of course procedures, and to compare the course with traditional courses, was returned by 46 of the 54 students in the classes. Some findings were: (1) the major factor influencing a student to take the course was the expectation that he could work at his own pace; (2) individualized instruction appeared to afford the student greater opportunities to assimilate course materials and interact with the instructor; (3) the flexible scheduling did not stimulate learning because too many students tended to procrastinate; and (4) students favored the individualized course to the traditional courses, although they missed having a class identity and class discussions. (RN)

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INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN SOCIOLOGY:

MYTH AND FACT

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INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION IN SOCIOLOGY: MYTH AND FACT

What is the value of individualized instruction? Is it a primary mode of instruction? Should it be used as supplemental material, or should it be totally discarded?

These questions were the basis for my research to determine whether individualized instruction has any relevance for the community college situation. The following study depicts my experience in applying this innovative mode of instruction in three introductory Sociology 101 courses at Moraine Valley Community College, Palos Hills, Ill.

DEFINITION

A review of educational literature provides many definitions and explanations of individualized instruction. Interpretations of the term run the gamut from programmed learning materials to audio-tutorial learning situations. In my basic Sociology 101 courses, individualized instruction incorporated the following elements:

- A programmed learning textbook broken down into units with self-administered and self-scored exercises and tests
- Measurable behavioral objectives which guide the student as he works at his own pace through the programmed units
- Instructor-student conferences which assist students in understanding the programmed materials

- Self-paced learning which gives the student freedom to choose his own time and place for study
- Reinforcement through computer-scored tests and teacher-student conferences which provide for immediate student gratification

HYPOTHESIS

Because Moraine Valley Community College is a commuter school with 85 per cent of its students holding full or part-time jobs, I theorized that individualized instruction, with its flexible scheduling, would afford students greater opportunity to assimilate course materials and interact with the instructor and would stimulate the learning process more than the traditional college lecture-discussion method.

COURSE PROCEDURES

In the spring term of 1972 my three introductory Sociology 101 classes used an individualized instruction programmed learning textbook and had periodic classroom sessions, written tests and instructor-student conferences. Each student was required to complete independently a unit (exercises and progress tests) in the textbook and then to confer with the instructor regarding the work completed. After the interview, the student was sent to the Individualized Learning Center to take a written exam on the programmed learning unit he had just completed. This process was duplicated for each of the 12 units in the textbook. After the last unit, the student was given a final exam covering all the units. A student's semester grade was determined by counting the 12 unit exam scores as two-thirds of the grade and the semester test as one-third.

All written exams taken in the Individualized Learning Center were computer scored. The IBM 370-Model 135 computer not only printed the student's total number of correct answers for each exam but also identified the individual items he missed. The informative computer print-out sheet was posted daily in the I.L.C. for the student's perusal, and a duplicate copy was forwarded to the instructor for his records. The student also had the option of meeting with the instructor to review and discuss his test results.

Class sessions for discussing material in the textbook, hearing lectures or viewing films were held about once every two weeks. These meetings were optional and had no grade value attached to them. They were open forums where students could exchange ideas or delve deeper into concepts introduced in the text.

DATA COLLECTION

During the last two months of my individualized Sociology courses, the college's Institutional Services Division and I developed a questionnaire to evaluate the sociology student's individualized learning experience in terms of pre-course expectations and course procedures and to compare the course with courses using the traditional lecture-discussion method. Questionnaires were distributed and returned through the U.S. mail and had no identifiable marks on them. Students were not required to respond, but 46 of a possible 54 did.

QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

PRE-COURSE EXPECTATIONS:

Analysis of the data from the questionnaires indicates that the most discernible factor influencing a student to take the individualized instruction sociology course was the expectation that he could work at his own pace. However, many students apparently harbored erroneous pre-course expectations about this mode of instruction. Some students interpreted individualized instruction as meaning no class sessions and/or no textbook; others didn't know exactly what to expect. These misconceptions could have stemmed from failure of the student to understand the concept of individualized instruction or from misunderstanding of the mode of instruction by the counselor who channeled the student into the course.

In the fall of 1972, Moraine Valley Community College experimented with a new registration technique to eliminate a student's misconceptions of modes of instruction used in each course. This procedure involves placing on the master class schedule written descriptions of the modes of instruction used by each instructor. Consequently, when a student registers for a course he knows exactly how the course will be taught. The college hopes that this technique and the more frequent use of individualized instruction by other instructors will eliminate students pre-course misconceptions.

COURSE PROCEDURES:

In general, the students felt that the course procedures were clearly defined and explained. They particularly liked the fact that the programmed learning textbook included measurable behavioral objectives to guide them and self-administered exercises and progress tests to reinforce their learning. But, many students complained about their lack of self-discipline and motivation in doing the programmed units. Apparently, students do not want a completely free and independent learning situation. Because a student with a traditional educational background probably expects guidelines and standards to be set for him, I found it necessary to modify the completely independent nature of my individualized Sociology course. One important revision is the incorporation of deadline dates for taking unit exams. If a student does not take a unit exam by the deadline date, he is given a failing grade for that unit. This modification is designed to provide structure and motivation for those students who need them.

Another aspect of the course students rated highly was the student-teacher conferences. They indicated that these interviews helped to clarify points and develop a better understanding of material presented in the textbook. Many students also liked the fact that the conferences were flexible and that they were not required to come in at a particular time, but could choose their own time.

The grading procedure in this Sociology course was rated favorably by the students. They appreciated the fact that they knew their grades and their mistakes immediately after taking the exam. Particular praise is due the Individualized Learning Center staff who administered tests and the computer center that scored them so quickly. It is imperative for an instructor using the individualized mode of instruction with more than 50 students and without the help of a computer to have at least one student aide to assist him in administering and scoring tests. Students are continually looking for gratification and reinforcement through exam scores. To keep interest in the course high, the instructor must provide test scores as quickly as possible.

COMPARING INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION TO LECTURE-DISCUSSION

TEACHING MODE:

The students appeared to enjoy learning in the unstructured and independent environment provided in Sociology 101 by the programmed learning units and the few class sessions. Students believe that the flexibility of individualized instruction gave them greater freedom and opportunity to assimilate course material because they could work at their own pace and time. But, unfortunately, many felt that they lacked the initial motivation to begin the learning process. Without the traditional classroom setting, many students felt no compulsion to do the programmed units. Consequently, they did the traditional course work first and procrastinated the individualized course work.

In comparing the individualized instruction course with a traditional lecture-discussion course, the students favored the individualized course. They felt this way because they could work at their own pace and could receive immediate gratification (quick test results) for their work. However, the students surveyed pointed out that two positive aspects of the traditional mode of instruction are missed in the individualized course. First, they felt that individualization caused them to lose their identity as a class. They felt isolated from their peers, although they had more interaction with the instructor. Second, students missed the traditional classroom discussion. They felt there were too few class sessions to promote a true exchange of ideas by the students. They believed that much of the material covered in the programmed learning units should have been discussed openly. Many students felt that because sociology deals with probing questions on important issues which do not have cut and dried answers discussion should be an integral part of any sociology course.

CONCLUSION

The questionnaire data appears to support my hypothesis that individualized instruction would afford the community college student greater opportunity to assimilate course materials and interact with the instructor than the traditional college lecture-discussion method. But, the evidence indicates I was wrong in assuming that the flexible scheduling in my individualized instruction Sociology courses would stimulate learning. Most students felt that this free environment was detrimental to their learning because it afforded them too much time and they tended to procrastinate. Consequently, the students asked that the

course be more structured to force them to learn. I hope the addition of deadline dates to my revised individualized Sociology course will eliminate this problem.

With the small sample and limited application of scientific techniques in this study, no attempt was made to develop a comprehensive theory regarding individualized instruction and its implications for the community college situation. But I hope that these limited findings will make other college instructors aware of the advantages and disadvantages of individualized instruction and stimulate further research in this innovative area.

QUESTIONNAIRE AND TALLY RESULTS
INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION Soc. 101

Pre-Course Expectations

For each of the following possible pre-course expectations, blacken space:

- A. If the expectation strongly influenced your enrollment in Soc. 101
B. If the expectation has some influence on your enrollment in Soc. 101
C. If the expectation had no influence on your enrollment in Soc. 101

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>No Response</u>
1. No regular class sessions	34%	32%	30%	2%
2. No textbook	10%	34%	54%	2%
3. A chance to learn at my own rate	67%	26%	6%	1%
4. A lot of free time	30%	32%	36%	2%
5. Individual conferences with instructor	28%	50%	21%	1%
6. An easy grade	8%	21%	69%	2%
7. A chance to study what I wanted to learn	36%	29%	23%	2%
8. A chance to try a new way of learning	58%	23%	15%	4%
9. Other...				

10. Which source contributed most to your pre-course expectations about individualized Soc. 101?

A. Personal experiences with individualized instruction	36%
B. Other students' comments about individualized instruction	21%
C. MVCC counselor comments about individualized instruction	4%
D. Other... 1) Wanted a new learning experience	24%
2) Did not know	10%

11. How well were your pre-course expectations met by individualized Soc. 101?

A. Very well	58%
B. Somewhat	35%
C. Not at all	7%

Course Procedures

For each of the following course procedures, blacken:

- A. If your answer is YES
B. If your answer is NO
C. If you are UNCERTAIN

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>C</u>	<u>No Response</u>
12. Were the course objectives clearly explained	86%	10%	2%	2%
13. Were procedures for using the programmed units clearly explained?	89%	6%	4%	1%
14. Were procedures for scheduling conferences with instructor clearly explained?	89%	6%	4%	1%
15. Was the grading procedure clearly explained?	93%	0%	6%	1%
16. Were the instructor-student conferences before and after each unit helpful to you?	83%	6%	10%	1%

Reactions to Individualized Soc. 101

For each of the following reactions to individualized Soc. 101, blacken:

- A. If you agree with the reaction
B. If you disagree with the reaction

	<u>A</u>	<u>B</u>	<u>No Response</u>
17. I learned more than I usually do in a typical group-taught course.	60%	32%	8%
18. I liked individualized learning better than a typical group learning course.	63%	34%	3%
19. I had more personal contact with the instructor than I do in typical group-taught course.	71%	28%	1%
20. I found programmed units easier to learn from than textbooks.	84%	8%	8%
21. I found it difficult to establish and follow a study schedule for this course.	39%	58%	3%
22. I liked being able to work at my own pace.	86%	10%	4%
23. Getting test results immediately help me to learn better.	84%	13%	3%
24. Before my first conference with the instructor I didn't know what we'd do in a conference.	87%	13%	
25. I was more motivated to study this course than my group-taught courses.	47%	45%	8%
26. I would have liked some more group discussion of course topics.	45%	50%	5%
27. I enjoyed learning without formal class meetings.	80%	15%	5%

Open-Ended Comments

Complete each of the statements below in the space provided:

28. The feature that I like best about individualized Soc. 101 was:

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Number of Replies</u>
1	Self paced -----	40
2	Flexibility of scheduling-----	35
3	Student-teacher conferences-----	30
4	Grading procedure-----	29
5	Programmed units-----	28

29. The feature that I liked least about individualized Soc. 101 was:

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Number of Replies</u>
1	Lacked motivation-----	37
2	Too much freedom-----	30
3	Not enough class discussions-----	19
4	Not enough teacher office hours-----	6

30. Learning Soc. 101 through individualized study would have been easier or more enjoyable if:

<u>Ranking</u>	<u>Response</u>	<u>Number of Replies</u>
1	A more structured situation-----	16
2	More group discussions-----	10

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